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Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros

The Effects of Using Critical Thinking to Enhance Speaking Skills in EFL/ESL Classrooms

Trabajo de titulación previo a la obtención del título de licenciado en Pedagogía del Idioma Inglés

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2024-09-06

Resumen

El siguiente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los efectos que tiene el pensamiento crítico y sus técnicas para el mejoramiento de las habilidades del habla. Veinte estudios empíricos han sido analizados a lo largo de esta investigación, diez de ellos proporcionan información sobre los efectos del pensamiento crítico en actividades orales, y diez están centrados en las técnicas usadas para mejorar las habilidades orales en clases de inglés como lengua extranjera y como segunda lengua. Las investigaciones mostraron efectos positivos en cuanto al uso de actividades de pensamiento crítico para mejorar las habilidades orales de aprendices jóvenes y adultos. Dentro de los resultados, se encuentran mejoras en aspectos del habla como la pronunciación, fluidez, comprensión, vocabulario, precisión, etc. Además, este trabajo discute las técnicas de pensamiento crítico que presentaron resultados positivos en los estudiantes de EFL/ESL tales como debates, preguntas de alto orden, presentaciones orales sobre temas abstractos y reflexivos, discusiones, etc. Los veinte artículos demuestran la importancia de implementar pensamiento crítico para mejorar las habilidades orales de estudiantes jóvenes y adultos.

Palabras clave del autor: pensamiento crítico, efectos, técnicas, habilidades orales, lengua extranjera

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Abstract

The following study aims to analyze the effects of critical thinking on speaking skills as well as the techniques used to enhance oral communication. Twenty empirical studies have been analyzed during this research; ten provide information about the effects of critical thinking (CT) and ten are centered on the techniques used to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ ESL classrooms. The researchers showed the positive effects of using CT techniques in teenagers and adult learners to improve their speaking skills. Improvements in speaking aspects such as pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, accuracy were also reported. Additionally, this work discusses the CT techniques that presented positive effects on EFL/ESL students: debates, high-order thinking questions, oral presentations about abstract and reflective topics, discussions, etc. The twenty articles show the importance of implementing critical thinking to enhance oral skills in young and adult learners.

Keywords: critical thinking, effects, techniques, foreign language

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this work to my family, an inexhaustible source of love, support and sacrifice. Thanks to my parents and siblings; they are the most important part in my life. To my special people Sebastian G, Nohelia, Mateo, Andres, Karina, and Melissa, who have shared laughter and tears throughout this academic journey. This achievement is all yours.

Ronald Chacho

Dedication

It is well known that we are a reflection of the people around us. For this reason, I want to dedicate this work to the people who have accompanied me throughout this process. Firstly, to my beautiful mother; I know I haven't been the best son but always I knew the result of this achievement would be for her. Mom, this is also yours. Second, it's important to recognize my family's support: my brother, my grandmother and Canelo, you are a fundamental pillar in my life. To my friends and people who provide me supportive words or just been there for me, I want to say thank you. And last but not least, I thank a special person who came into my life when I wasn't looking for her, but I needed her. Daniela P, I thank you for your support and love (even though you hate onions). Thank you all, with love.

Sebastián Vallejo

Introduction

The process in which people learn English involves four main skills. One of them, speaking, has a huge impact on the language. It is crucial when someone wants to become a proficient speaker because it is the core part of oral communication. The speaking skill involves essential aspects like fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary. There are different approaches by which someone improves their oral performance; one of them is the use of Critical Thinking (CT). CT refers to specific abilities, such as the proficiency to objectively evaluate problems or arguments (Mason, 2007). Several studies have been analyzed to examine the positive and negative sides of the use of CT and, at the same time, find the different activities and techniques that teachers can use to teach CT within the English classrooms.

Five chapters were developed to organize the different sections of this research synthesis. The first chapter presents an overview of the study, including the background, problem statement, the rational, research question, and the objectives to achieve. In the second chapter, we discuss the theoretical framework by providing general information about Critical Thinking and speaking skills as well as the literature review. The section of the literature review contains 20 significant empirical studies. The third chapter encloses the description of the methodology which includes the research approach, the studies retrieval, and the selection criteria for the studies. The fourth chapter presents the data analysis which encompasses 7 tables: 1) Primary Studies for the Research Synthesis, 2) The effects of using critical thinking for enhancing speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms, 3) Positive effects on speaking skills aspects, 4) Critical thinking activities and techniques to enhance speaking skills, 5) Research Methods of the Studies, 6) Data Collection Instruments, 7) Participants' Age. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusion which emerged from the previous analysis as well as recommendations which consider the different ways of carrying out critical thinking techniques.

CHAPTER I

Description of the Research

1.1 Background

As time goes by, students and teachers are constantly searching for strategies and/or tools to improve English Language Learning. Learning English involves four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which are fundamental to using and understanding the language. These skills try to promote the development of learners' communicative competence. According to Malmir (2012), "Speaking skills are often considered the most important part of an EFL course" (p. 610). In addition, Yuniar (2021) stated that "Speaking is a highly complicated and dynamic skill that concerns the use of several processes such as cognitive, physical, and socio-cultural" (p. 4). Therefore, many language learners and teachers seek strategies to enhance that area.

Although many students have mastered basic speaking skills, some are much more effective in their oral communication than others (Malmir, 2012). Since speaking a language requires a special ability such as the use of language properly in social interactions, different approaches have been established to achieve an optimal level of speaking. Particularly, one of the well-known approaches to enhance students' speaking abilities is the implementation of CT skills in English classrooms (Liang & Fung, 2021).

Even though it is not easy to offer a single definition of CT, there is one that is appropriate for this study. According to Leal Hernandez and Gomez Rodriguez (2016), "Critical thinking is understood as a mental and rational activity that involves different processes: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, among others" (p. 138).
Therefore, there are many reasons for helping EFL and also ESL students improve their CT. One of them is to expand their speaking abilities when they need to express thoughts and arguments in a foreign language (Leal Hernandez & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016).

The Education system should not only be concerned with teaching grammar forms or linguistics. It may involve real life settings. This will help students carry out communicative processes and develop their CT while learning a foreign language (Leal Hernandez & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016). Different studies have reached similar conclusions regarding the use of CT as a strategy for enhancing speaking skills. According to Lavanya and Raju (2020), "Learners

learn perfectly the constructive mechanism of speaking in English language labs and classrooms through Critical Thinking" (p. 1). In the same way, Yaprak (2020) stated that teachers have to enrich their awareness of CT skills first, and then integrate those skills into their classrooms. In addition, CT could serve as a virtuous technique for enhancing speaking skills and personal development in students (Leal Hernandez & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the context of English language teaching and learning, there is a wide variety of techniques that language instructors use to enhance speaking skills and CT is one of them. According to Basri et al. (2018), hardly anyone is born with CT skills and people need to be trained to learn those skills. This might reflect a fundamental failure in the educational system since schools usually have problems when developing CT skills (Tosuncuoglu, 2018).

There are different conditions to apply and practice CT to be meaningful. For example, Tosuncuoglu (2018) mentioned that "Learners of critical thinking are the persons who investigate, analyze, accept or deny the data, evaluate and come to conclusions, and so on" (p. 28). However, according to Brown and Yuke (as cited in Rao, 2019), CT skills for speaking are not directly taught in classrooms, and teachers do not use real situations when implementing CT skills in their English classrooms. In other words, when teachers try to get students involved in CT skills, they do not do it appropriately. In addition, Yaprak (2020) stated that it is necessary to keep in mind that students may show resistance to thinking critically or simply they may not know how to think critically. Therefore, the insufficiency of activities or some specific techniques to develop or apply CT strategies need to be searched to find tools or instruments with which students upgrade their speaking skills.

According to Yaprak (2020), despite the importance of using CT in a classroom, there are not many studies that show teachers how to integrate it. Also, there is a lot of information about how to use CT strategies in other areas for ESL learners, but enough for EFL learners. Most articles focus on the importance of CT, but there is a lack of information about how it could be implemented in the curriculums to be taught in schools (El Soufi & See, 2019).

1.3 Rationale

CT is a crucial skill that involves evaluating information and arguments for effective communication, allowing students to analyze and make reasoned judgments about a topic. When developing CT skills, students can enhance their ability to express ideas clearly and persuasively. The lack of explicit instruction on CT in oral tasks in a classroom can affect

students when analyzing and evaluating information to be able to have a strong performance when sharing their ideas orally. In addition, since CT is not directly integrated into classroom instruction, teachers do not know what strategies can be effective to guide students to construct well-reasoned and coherent speech, and logically structure their thoughts to support their claims and arguments.

According to Nold (2017), CT strategies are not widely used today by teachers and/or students due to a lack of comprehension. Furthermore, as Arfae (2019) mentioned, there is a significant relationship between CT and EFL learners' speaking skills. Teachers can guide students to use CT strategies to enhance good oral performance. In addition, teachers and students should know that CT strategies need to be implemented in every English classroom as they integrate learners' use of the four main skills of the English language through the completion of specific tasks focused on improving English language learners' proficiency, resulting in learners' better communicative competence (Malmir, 2012).

CT can be useful in several aspects of communication. According to Johnson (as cited in Buphate & Esteban, 2022), CT allows learners to improve their mental activities such as analyzing and solving problems, making decisions, persuading, and conducting scientific research during the process of speaking in the classroom.

Our study attempts to provide scientific-based data that might guide teachers to improve the speaking abilities of their students in learning the English language. For all the mentioned reasons, we consider this research synthesis study important to examine the influence of CT strategies on the development of speaking skills. Furthermore, this study is important because it summarizes information for teachers to know how to use these strategies. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the effects of using CT to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms?
2. What are the reported CT techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms?

1.5 Objectives

1.5.1 General Objective

To determine the effects of CT on EFL/ESL students' speaking skills.

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

To identify whether there are positive or negative effects after using CT techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms.

To analyze the appropriate CT techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, key concepts about the use of CT in EFL/ESL classrooms are explored. This will help to know some authors' perspectives of CT regarding its definition, its influence, and its incorporation within English classrooms. Furthermore, the importance of speaking skills will be presented to show the relationship between these two concepts.

2.2 Definition of Critical Thinking

For some educators and researchers, there are many definitions of CT; some of them are related and some do not fit with them. According to Cottrell 2005, as cited in Lin, 2018 "Critical thinking is a self-adjusting cognitive process in which the mind is used to make reasonable judgments" (p. 2). On the other hand, Saleh (2019) stated that "curiosity and questioning are necessary characteristics of those who think critically as they always try to find answers for the questions they raise" (p. 2). This could match the relationship between using CT and enhancing vocabulary. In other words, students' vocabulary could increase as they practice and make use of CT activities. Tosuncuoglu (2018) said, "Critical thinking involves the ability to differentiate the usage of words in various contexts and implicitly understand the language" (p. 27). As these authors mentioned, CT implies certain capacities where the students use the language as a principal tool for learning and thinking critically. Therefore, CT activities and techniques can contribute to expanding the vocabulary of students, and as a consequence, they could give them the capacity to communicate appropriately in different contexts and situations.

2.3 Importance of Critical Thinking

Comparable with other strategies, techniques, and tools, CT has relevant importance in EFL classrooms. Ten Dam and Volman (2004) stated that CT development must be inherent in a social process with the goal of societies obtaining citizens who facilitate their progress and values in real-life situations. Therefore, the incorporation of CT in language teaching and learning should be manifested in different aspects including methods of instruction, learning materials, and assessment strategies (Saleh, 2019).

According to Leal Hernandez and Gomez Rodriguez (2016),

> EFL education should not only include linguistic topics in the curriculum as if the only concern were to teach grammar forms. It must contain social issues and real-life situations that enable learners to enhance their cognitive skills while learning the foreign language. (p.140)

2.4 The Importance of Speaking Skills

Rao (2019) claimed that “Among the four key language skills, speaking is deemed to be the most important skill in learning a foreign or second language” (p. 8). According to Brown and Yuke, (as cited in Rao, 2019), when EFL/ESL students practice speaking skills, real situations must be presented for the activities they will perform to be judged or graded in that skill. Dialogues or drills that do not resemble natural or real situations do not provide benefits for students to face real communication in life. That is why teachers must develop students´ communication, oral, and phonology skills when they teach English as a foreign or second language. One of the most important facts about speaking skills is that learners consider speaking as a difficult skill, and for most students speaking can take so many years to be developed (Bueno et al., 2006 as cited in Rao, 2019).

Bueno et al. (2006, as cited in Rao, 2019) agreed that EFL/ESL learners consider speaking skills to be one of the most difficult aspects they have to face when learning English as a foreign language or second language; they also have problems when applying communicative skills when performing real conversations such as formulation of ideas, pronunciation, articulation, etc. Rao (2019) stated that speaking is difficult because students have to create sentences spontaneously. Speaking skills involve a difficult process because students have to consider grammar and vocabulary to make sure their oral performance is accurate in communicating with others. As speaking contains micro-skills that deal with syntax, grammar, morphology, pragmatics, semantics, and phonology, it is a complete process of constructing meanings, producing statements and responses, and processing information. In addition, it is considered an interactive process because it involves another person unlike listening, reading, and writing (Zarifa, 2020).

As Zarifa (2020) stated, comprehending the context, purpose, setting, and speaker's personality is vital for constructing the intended meaning of a message. Furthermore, effective communication through speaking encompasses factors such as the individual's involvement, their relationship dynamics, and their cultural backgrounds. Speaking skills play a crucial role in various domains, including education, government, professions requiring English

proficiency, and the overall professional development of individuals (Macháčková, 2009 as cited in Zarifa, 2020).

2.5 Activities for Teaching Critical Thinking Strategies

According to Williams and Worth (2001, as cited in Alsaleh, 2020) CT should be taught directly. It means that the best way to think critically is to know how to do it, and for that, teachers have to implement CT theory and activities in specific courses instead of just a part of the course. Some of the appropriate activities to teach CT in classrooms are debates in class, problem-solution learning, collaborative task-based learning, and questioning and answering activities (Kuhn 1999, as cited in Alsaleh, 2020).

Lawrence et al. (2008, as cited in Alsaleh, 2020) found that both teachers and students acquire CT skills by performing activities that involve skills such as critiquing journal articles, debating a specific topic, writing research papers, analyzing case studies, and answering questions related to a topic. In other words, students can practice CT by providing and receiving different perspectives or opinions about any information given by the teacher.

Yang et al. (2005, as cited in Alsaleh, 2020) investigated that one of the most effective techniques for practicing CT in class is called Socratic Questioning. The Socratic Questioning serves to guide students to generate thoughtful questions and answer them. This questioning technique helps students to produce main ideas and analyze them, negotiate, compose questions, and answers, and reflect while discussing an issue.

Since CT is a mental process, it involves some steps to achieve the goal of thinking critically about an issue or topic. Lipman (1988, as cited in Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011) described CT as a complex logical process that can be acquired through the use of reasoning. The following are some strategies students should follow to be considered critical thinkers: look for evidence to answer, look for precise information about the topic in discussion, think in an open-minded way, take into account the situation of the discussion, do not lose sight of the main problem, search for reasons, establish a clear statement of the problem, accept opinions, and use reliable information to build the thinking (Ennis 1989, as cited in Behar-Horenstein & Niu, 2011)

Therefore, CT encompasses a large number of tools in which the use of vocabulary is essential for learning or perfecting CT. As mentioned by some authors, the best way to learn CT is directly, which means, to involve students in a scenario where they can use different

speaking activities, such as debates, opinions or talks, interviews, etc. They will contribute to enhancing students' speaking skills, which as was mentioned before, is one of the most difficult skills to improve or learn. Also, with the use of CT, we can open paths to knowing other functional and didactic techniques when wanting to learn or improve oral language skills. Consequently, the learning of a language does not have to involve only linguistic aspects, but with these different techniques, we can make interactional activities for students so that they can get involved and make the learning process easier for them.

2.6 Literature Review

The following description of this literature review involves a description of the studies and academic documents analyzed to fill the gap in our research. The 20 studies that were analyzed contain information about the effects or the impact of using CT for enhancing speaking skills in EFL and ESL classrooms, and the appropriate CT activities or techniques to improve speaking abilities.

2.7 The effects of using critical thinking for enhancing speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms

Most researchers found positive effects after using CT techniques for enhancing speaking skills (Afshar & Rahimi, 2014; Arfae, 2019; Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2018; Malmir, 2012; Ramezani et al., 2016; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014; Yaprak, 2020; Zare & Othman, 2015).

Yaprak (2020) integrated CT standards into Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) having a positive impact on students' oral performance, specifically in terms of three linguistic dimensions: fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Furthermore, other authors (Malmir, 2012; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014; Tosuncuoglu, 2018; Yaprak, 2020) argued that teachers should provide explicit instructions on CT and make students aware of its importance before implementing it in the classroom. This approach ensured that students understand how CT contributes to the development of aspects such as accuracy and reliability in their oral performance.

On the one hand, Tosuncuoglu (2018) proved the negative result of conducting a class applying CT activities without giving explicit instructions to enrich students' CT awareness. He conducted his study in a setting where teachers did not offer explicit CT instructions and showed that the majority of EFL students lack an understanding of CT, impeding their ability

to integrate it into their spoken communication and adversely affecting their oral performance. On the other hand, Sanavi and Tarighat (2014) analyzed the impact of teaching CT skills on the speaking proficiency of 30 Iranian EFL learners implementing The Preliminary English Test (PET) to assess their proficiency before and after the techniques of explicit CT. The results showed that increasing CT awareness directly improves speaking skills significantly.

Bakhshayesh et al. (2023), Malmir (2012), and Zare and Othman (2015) found that CT techniques have a crucial impact on the results of students' oral performance after using them in EFL/ESL classrooms. The students improved their speaking abilities such as vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Malmir, (2012) used CT techniques with advanced EFL learners at Shokouh Language Institute in Hamedan, Iran. The learners were involved in group discussions in order to talk about reflective topics such as friendship, drug addiction, happiness, etc. Likewise, Bakhshayesh et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of the implementation of CT with students from a language institute in Yazd, Iran showing an improvement specifically in fluency when speaking. Similarly, Zare and Othman (2015) utilized classroom debating, a CT technique, with a group of sixteen undergraduate students. Those involved in the study agreed that classroom debating assisted them in overcoming public speaking fear, improving their speaking proficiency, and enhancing their CT skills.

Basri et al. (2018) and Afshar and Rahimi (2014) carried out different studies showing similar results regarding CT and speaking skills. The results of both studies showed an enhancement in the speaking abilities of the participants by showing them more actively when they need to speak or give their opinions. The first study was conducted with 49 students of eleventh grade in Makassar which involved practicing speaking activities by reflecting on others' opinions and making the best decisions regarding what to say in response to the preceding conversation.

The second study, conducted in a private language institute in Sanandaj, Iran, investigated the association of CT, emotional intelligence, and speaking skills. The instruments related to CT and speaking skills were 'The California Critical Thinking Skills Test form B2 and The Language Oral Ability Assessment.'

Similarly, critical thinkers demonstrated better logical thinking, plus questioning skills, the ability to provide relevant information, and the capacity to draw reliable conclusions about others' opinions, as suggested by Arfae (2019) and Ramezani et al. (2016)

2.8 Critical thinking activities and techniques to enhance speaking skills

In this section, a brief description of each CT technique for enhancing speaking skills will be discussed. These techniques have been applied by researchers to young and adult students in different educational settings. Also, the researchers mentioned below showed the effectiveness of these CT techniques through practice.

Yuniar (2021) claimed that EFL/ESL students encountered difficulties in speaking, engaging in communication, and participating in class discussions. Some techniques that address these difficulties include engaging in routine speaking exercises, participating in debates, and actively taking part in discussions. In fact, all played a vital role in fostering the growth of students' speaking skills, confidence, and proficiency in public speaking. These activities served as effective approaches for honing oral performance by generating ideas, defending arguments, and enriching vocabulary and fluency.

Likewise, Thammanoon and Reuben (2022) mentioned the ideation discussion technique, which consists of a process to generate and communicate ideas on a certain topic through a final oral presentation. This helped students to increase ideas through discussions and practice their oral presentations. In the same way, Iman (2017) asserted that participating in debates, a CT exercise, enhances various sub-skills like fluency, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and vocabulary among students in EFL setting.

Kavanoz and Akbaş (2017) also mentioned techniques used by EFL teachers in their classrooms which consist of students creating their material after a reading lesson, discussion between the students about the topic, students’ personal experience, and questioning techniques.

Furthermore, Liang and Fung (2021) collected data to adapt exploratory talks and WebQuests to help learners of EFL classrooms develop CT skills. The participants included 125 students between 11-12 years old and 5 English teachers in a primary school in Hong Kong. The results stated that participants shared their views, and they used explicit reasoning to explain their opinions, which brought about an improvement in the students' speeches.

Nurhajati et al. (2020) discussed the use of the Sekawan-P model; these authors applied this method to 32 students in a senior high school. It involved four steps: selecting materials, planning, developing, and presenting. In this learning approach, students started by

selecting a topic and planning its organization. They then engaged in discussions based on gathered information in order to prepare for a role-play presentation.

According to some researchers (Akatsuka, 2019; Candilas, 2021; Hani et al., 2016; Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016), the use of the following approaches significantly improved the fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, and accuracy of the student's oral presentations.

Firstly, Candilas (2021) explained that Socratic questioning is a technique that consists of implementing CT questions before, during, and after speaking-related tasks such as reporting, oral recitations, oral revalidation, interviews, and picture analysis activity. He used this technique with 35 students in a Propositive Communication class at a private college in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines.

Secondly, Akatsuka (2019) highlighted the use of higher-order thinking Skills (HOTS) questions as a crucial technique for enhancing both CT and speaking skills. The researcher applied this method to 22 private senior high school students in Japan. The technique involved presenting articles to the students, who then read and reflected on the information in pairs or groups. Subsequently, the students answered reflective questions, referred to as (HOTS) questions, to prepare for a presentation about the article, which they delivered in front of the class. Following each presentation, the rest of the class asked questions to clarify the information.

Thirdly, Leal Hernández and Gomez Rodriguez. (2016), showed that it is possible to improve CT skills through the discussions of real situations since “we live in a society in which social conflicts such as violence, crime, and lack of values, among others, have become a constant reality” (p.137).

Finally, Hani et al. (2016) pointed out the use of The Six Thinking Hats (STH). The participants involved 48 students. This strategy refers to the students having to think and discuss a problem from different perspectives. A group of 6 members was assigned hats to solve an issue (a) White hat thinks about the information of the problem (b) Black hat thinks about problems and why something may not work; (c) Red hat talks about feeling intuition; (d) Green hat talks about finding new solutions; (e) Yellow hat talks about values and benefits; (f) Blue hat discusses how to do something, where to focus, and what to do next about the topic or problem.

The literature review has gathered the effects of applying CT within English classrooms and the different techniques to enhance students' speaking skills. Most of the effects were positive after implementing a whole range of techniques that enhance speaking skills. In the next chapter, the methodology will be presented.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Norris and Ortega (2006) defined research synthesis as “the systematic secondary review of accumulated primary research studies” (p. 4). Therefore, to develop this research synthesis, an in-depth search was performed.

The information was collected from online databases such as ERIC, REDALYC, SCIELO, EBSCO, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar. Some of the journals that were considered for the data collection studies were the following: International Journal on Integrated Education (IJIE), Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics, Waffen-Und Kostumkunde Journal.

The criteria for selecting the articles were the following. First, the studies had to be empirical and the articles must include the effects of using CT for enhancing speaking skills and the appropriate techniques to enhance speaking skills. Second, these articles needed to be written in English. Finally, the articles had to be published since 2008 to have updated information to obtain accurate results. We considered that research published before this year may not provide relevant information. Another exclusion criteria was the language of the article: articles written in a language other than English were not used.

The keywords that were used for the research process were CT, techniques, speaking skills, EFL/ESL classrooms, and EFL/ESL students.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

In this section of the research synthesis, the results of the 20 empirical studies that were analyzed will be discussed according to the research questions and objectives established in Chapter 1. The first part of the data analysis will discuss the primary studies used for the research, the effects of CT techniques on speaking skills, and the main CT techniques. The second part will present methodological aspects which will show more insights in the analysis of CT. Tables are presented to display the aforementioned categories.

Table 1

4.1 *Primary Studies for the Research Synthesis*

Foci of the study	Authors	N° of studies
The effects of using CT to enhance Speaking skills	Afshar & Rahimi (2014); Arfae (2019); Bakhshayesh et al. (2023); Basri et al. (2018); Malmir (2012); Ramezani et al. (2016); Sanavi & Tarighat (2014) Tosuncuoglu (2018); Yaprak (2020); Zare & Othman (2015)	10
CT techniques to enhance speaking skills	Akatsuka (2019); Candilas (2021); Hani et al. (2016); Iman (2017); Kavanoz & Akbas (2017); Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodroguez (2016); Liang & Fung (2021); Nurhajati et al. (2020); Thammanoon & Ruben (2022); Yuniar (2021)	10

N=20

Table 1 is utilized as a comprehensive tool to categorize and present the findings from the 20 empirical studies involved in the literature review, showing the diverse aspects of the research setting. The first aim is to supply readers with a structured overview, facilitating a detailed understanding of the key points within the analyzed studies. The leading category looks into the impacts of CT on the enhancement of speaking skills. Through a discerning analysis of these studies, our goal is to decode the link between CT abilities and the improvement of effective oral expression. The second category focuses on the analysis of specific CT techniques applied to enrich speaking skills. These aspects aim to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What are the reported effects of using CT to enhance speaking skills in EFL classrooms?

RQ2: What are the reported CT techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL classrooms?

The first two tables and their subsequent analysis attempt to answer the first research question.

Table 2

4.2 The effects of using critical thinking for enhancing speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms.

Effects of CT techniques to enhance speaking skills	Authors	N° of studies
Positive effects	Afshar & Rahimi (2014); Arfae (2019); Bakhshayesh et al. (2023); Basri et al. (2018); Malmir (2012); Ramezani et al. (2016); Sanavi & Tarighat (2014); Yaprak (2020); Zare & Othman (2015)	9
Negative effects	Tosuncuoglu (2018)	1
N=10		

Table 2 shows the effects of the studies selected in the literature review. For this analysis, 10 studies were analyzed since they showed the effects of using CT techniques to enhance speaking skills. It is worth mentioning that not all the 20 studies were considered for Table 2 because those studies discussed the appropriate CT techniques in EFL/ESL settings.

Nine empirical studies showed positive effects on oral performance after implementing CT techniques in English classes. Malmir (2012) mentioned that using CT techniques has a crucial impact on student's speaking abilities, such as vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. Furthermore, students not only improved in the aspects mentioned above but also in comprehension and coherence.

However, one of the studies had a negative effect. A study conducted by Tosuncuoglu (2018), found that the use of CT techniques needed a previous explanation of the main CT concepts: meaning, interpretation, inference, and logic. In addition, he stated that teachers needed to give explicit instructions to students about this approach before implementing any technique related to this concept.

Taking all this information into consideration, the subsequent table will present the effects.

Table 3

4.3 Positive effects on speaking skills aspects

Speaking skills aspects	Authors	N° of studies
Accuracy	Basri et al. (2018); Malmir (2012); Yaprak (2020)	3
Fluency	Afshar & Rahimi (2014); Bakhshayesh et al. (2023) Sanavi & Tarighat (2014)	3
Other aspects such as vocabulary, comprehension, public speaking fear, etc.	Arfae (2019); Ramenazi et al. (2016); Zare & Othman (2015)	3
N=9		

Table 3 presents the authors that obtained a positive effect regarding accuracy, fluency, and other aspects such as vocabulary, comprehension, public speaking fear, etc.

Even though Tosuncuoglu (2018) has shown a negative effect since CT instruction was not appropriately provided to the participants, the majority of studies presented a perceptible improvement in the participants' speaking skills. It can be deduced that the implementation of CT marks a difference between students who used it and those who did not.

It is important to point out some elements of different studies to have a wider picture of the improvement in speaking skills. The integration of CT within the teaching methodology known as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) was proven to know if it enhances students' performance showing a positive impact in specific aspects: fluency, accuracy, and complexity (Malmir, 2012). Also, this author states that CT increases vocabulary and improves pronunciation as well as fluency (Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014) and accuracy (Yaprak, 2020). Additionally, since CT works in combination with certain teaching methodologies that enhance speaking skills, it is advantageous to implement CT within the TBLT method in EFL and ESL classrooms (Yaprak, 2020).

Indeed, improving speaking skills involves improving oral tests. Students who do not know and do not use CT may have lower levels of oral performance having as a result lower grades, and thus, their speaking proficiency may be affected. Due to that, it is noticeable the difference between learners using CT and those who do not (Arfae, 2019). Furthermore, some abilities that sometimes are not taken into account, such as asking appropriate questions, thinking logically, and giving relevant information, can be improved with the incorporation of CT activities (Ramenazi et al., 2016).

In addition, Malmir (2012) mentioned that learners show an improvement in organizing thoughts and articulating them during interviews. The relationship between speaking skills and CT has to do not only with maintaining conversations, having interviews, and everything related to articulating words fluently but also with developing comprehension when speaking. This leads to infer that CT helps to elicit messages concisely and coherently. In other words, if learners are more critical thinkers, they will become more proficient and fluent in their L2.

Zare and Othman (2015) argued that the fear of "public speaking" is one of the common issues that EFL/ESL learners have to overcome. So, what can a student do? CT can help learners with the problems they may be facing during their path of EFL/ESL learning. For that

reason, their study involved a CT technique called “Classroom Debate” which improved oral performance and overcame the fear of speaking.

Afshar and Rahimi (2014) and Basri et al. (2018) agreed that by losing the fear of talking in public, the instant effect on students would be to speak fluently and give their opinions. Within their studies, there was a striking improvement related to the following aspects: better speaking decisions (knowing what to say), better logical thinking, and reliable conclusions.

The following table aims to answer the second research questions about the different activities and techniques that CT can have in order to improve speaking abilities.

Table 4

4.4 Critical thinking activities and techniques to enhance speaking skills

Techniques to enhance speaking skills	Authors	N° of studies
Debates	Iman (2017); Yuniar (2021)	2
Exploratory talk	Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez (2016); Liang & Fung (2021)	2
Higher Order Thinking Skills	Akatsuka (2019)	1
Ideation/ Questioning technique	Kavanoz & Akbas (2017); Thammanoon & Reuben (2022)	2
Sekawan-P model	Nurhajati et al. (2020)	1
Six Thinking Hats	Hani et al. (2016)	1
Socratic Questioning	Candilas (2021)	1

N=10

Table 4 displays CT activities and techniques commonly used for EFL/ESL learners. Two of the ten analyzed studies on CT activities/techniques disclosed participation in debates. According to Iman (2017) and Yuniar (2021), in debates, the students’ role ensures that they possess fundamental knowledge regarding the topic and diverse perspectives to support their

opinions. Also, they explained that the use of debates encourages students to participate in class discussions, and the ideas or opinions that they evoke with these debate activities invest their CT awareness at the same time that their oral communication flows each time they need to address their opinions about an issue or topic.

Moreover, the discussion technique is another tool used for the improvement of speaking skills. In three studies, the authors (Kavanoz &Akbaş, 2017; Nurhajati et al., 2020; Thammanoon & Reuben, 2022) proposed the “discussion time” but with different concluding activities. The main purpose of this technique is to create a space in which students can communicate among themselves, always looking for an improvement in oral performance, fluency, accuracy, comprehension, and pronunciation. The fact that students generate an idea, and then discuss it using their speech ability consciously or unconsciously, leads us to know that the technique is useful among EFL/ESL learners. Meanwhile, Kavanoz and Akbaş (2017) center the CT tool just focusing on the discussion; two of the authors Nurhajati et al. (2020) and Thammanoon and Reuben (2022) have the following explicit ending activities: oral presentation and role-play presentation. This means that discussion can help students to improve their oral performance, thus, creating a crucial social ability among EFL/ESL learners (Kavanoz & Akbaş, 2017; Nurhajati et al., 2020; Thammanoon & Reuben, 2022).

Leal Hernández and Gomez Rodriguez (2016) and Liang and Fung (2021) stated that the use of “exploratory talk” makes students engage in critical and constructive listening to each other's ideas. In other words, students are required to explore the different possible solutions to a topic. With this technique, students are encouraged to provide reasons to back up their ideas rather than simply asserting a complaint.

Table 4 encompasses other 3 different activities/techniques derived from various studies (Akatsuka, 2019; Candelas, 2021; Hani et al., 2016). First, the activity “Higher Order Thinking Skills” presented different articles to the students so that in pairs or collaborative groups they could read, evaluate, create, and innovate the information provided. Second, Six Thinking Hats enhanced the listening and communication skills through the application of six members who were assigned the task of solving an issue with six different statements. Finally, Socratic questioning allowed to ask CT questions before, during, and after speaking-related tasks like interviews, oral presentations, picture analysis activities, etc.

The following section analyzes methodological aspects that support the reliability of each research and give more insights into the phenomenon studied:

Firstly, the research methods (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method) applied are presented in Table 5. Secondly, the next tables display the instruments that were used to collect data, and the participants' age range is considered to show whether there are positive or negative effects after using CT techniques to enhance speaking skills.

Table 5

4.5 Research Methods of the Studies

Research design	Authors	N° of studies
Quantitative	Afshar & Rahimi (2014); Arfae (2019); Bakhshayesh et al. (2023); Basri et al. (2018); Candilas (2021); Hani et al. (2016); Iman (2017); Ramezani et al. (2016); Thammanoon & Ruben (2022)	9
Qualitative	Kavanoz & Akbas (2017); Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez (2016); Malmir (2012); Yuniar (2021)	4
Mixed- methods	Akatsuka (2019); Liang & Fung (2021); Nurhajati et al. (2020); Sanavi & Tarighat (2014); Tosuncuoglu (2018); Yaprak (2020); Zare & Othman (2015)	7

N= 20

Table 5 presents the research designs that were utilized in the 20 studies involved in this research synthesis.

The qualitative method was the least common; however, the quantitative and mixed methods were the most used. Some researchers (Kavanoz & Akbas, 2017; Leal Hernández and Gomez Rodriguez, 2016; Malmir, 2012; Yuniar, 2021) have chosen a qualitative method

to show the results or effects of their study. For them, that kind of method was necessary to have a holistic view of the use of CT techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ESL. Also, this method served to understand the participants' perception of the CT techniques to improve their speaking skills and the expectations they had at the end of the study.

In contrast, other authors (Afshar & Rahimi, 2014; Arfae, 2019; Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2018; Candilas, 2021; Hani et al., 2016; Iman, 2017; Ramezani et al., 2016; Thammanoon & Ruben, 2022) considered a quantitative method to analyze changes in the participants after applying the different CT techniques. This method was crucial to demonstrate the improvement in the participants' speaking proficiency in numbers. Finally, a mixed-method was also used by some researchers (Akatsuka, 2019; Liang & Fung, 2021; Nurhajati et al., 2020; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014; Tosuncuoglu, 2018; Yaprak, 2020; Zare & Othman, 2015) to show not only how much CT techniques improved the participants' speaking skills but also to analyze the participants' understanding of CT awareness and CT techniques before and after the study.

Table 6

4.6 Data Collection Instruments

Instruments	Authors	N° of studies
Pre-test and post-test	*Akatsuka (2019); Afshar & Rahimi (2014); Arfae (2019); Basri et al. (2018); Candilas (2021); Hani et al. (2016); Iman (2017); Liang & Fung (2021); *Nurhajati et al. (2020); Ramezani et al. (2016); Thammanoon & Ruben (2022); *Sanavi & Tarighat (2014); *Tosuncuoglu (2018); *Yaprak (2020); *Zare & Othman (2015)	15
	Bakhshayesh et al. (2023); Kavanoz & Akbas (2017);	5

Others (interviews, surveys, observations, etc)	Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez, (2016); Malmir (2012); Yuniar (2021)

N= 20

Note. Some authors have an asterisk since they not only utilized pre-tests and post-tests for their research but also other instruments such as interviews to take into account the participants' perceptions, and observations to analyze how the study was conducted and the process of the techniques themselves.

Table 6 offers a detailed summary of the wide range of research tools that were used to gather data for the 20 investigations. Pre- and post-tests were administered, which was the method used in most of these investigations; 15 of the research projects specifically used these tools. The principal aim of using them was to carefully evaluate the influence of CT methods on the cognizance of CT abilities and the consequent improvement of students' speaking competence. With the use of this dual-testing approach, researchers were able to obtain a comprehensive picture of the developmental trajectory and a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which participants were impacted by the application of CT methods throughout the investigations.

Pre-tests played a crucial role in creating a baseline measurement by providing information about participants' first critical thinking awareness and speaking ability. The post-tests were given after the CT approaches were used in order to measure the degree of development in speaking proficiency and CT abilities as well as the efficacy of the treatments. In addition to strengthening the study methodology's robustness, the methodical use of pre- and post-tests enabled a comparison analysis, which helped the researchers reach significant findings about how CT procedures affected the targeted skill sets. The findings' validity and reliability are improved by this methodological rigor, which also adds to the larger body of research on the application of CT methods to improve speaking abilities.

Additionally, other instruments such as interviews, surveys, and observations were applied in 5 studies. These instruments were useful in addressing various aspects, including students' awareness of CT, teachers' perceptions toward CT techniques, and expectations that both students and teachers had regarding the use of CT techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL/ ESL classrooms.

As established in Table 5, some studies involved a mixed-method. This approach allowed researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how CT techniques functioned with

the participants involved in each study. The use of this method revealed the enrichment in the participants' speaking skills and the participants' understanding of CT. This exposed both positive and negative results and provided insights into perceptions when applying CT techniques to enhance speaking skills.

Table 7

4.7 Participants' Age

Group	Age range	Authors	N° of studies
Children	5-11	None	0
Teenagers	12-17	Akatsuka (2019); Bakhshayesh et al. (2023); Basri et al. (2018); Hani et al. (2016); Iman (2017); Kavanoz & Akbas (2017); Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez, (2016); Liang & Fung (2021); Nurhajati et al. (2020)	9
Adults	18-30	Afshar & Rahimi (2014); Arfae (2019); Candilas (2021); Malmir (2012); Ramezani et al. (2016); Sanavi & Tarighat (2014);	11

	Thammanoon & Ruben (2022); Tosuncuoglu (2018); Yaprak (2020); Yuniar (2021); Zare & Othman (2015)

N= 20

Table 7 displays the age range of the participants of each study. The division into three groups: children, teenagers, and adults were carried out in order to provide a more nuanced comprehension of the results among various age groups.

This stratification is especially useful because it enables a thorough analysis of how CT approaches influence the development of language abilities in people at different levels of cognitive and linguistic maturity.

Some researchers (Akatsuka, 2019; Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2018; Hani et al., 2016; Iman, 2017; Kavanoz & Akbas, 2017; Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016; Liang & Fung, 2021; Nurhajati et al., 2020) focus their attention on the teenagers' group. Their collective findings highlight the efficacy of CT approaches in bolstering speaking abilities among teenagers. The consensus emerging from these studies underscores the pivotal role played by this age group in exhibiting discernible changes during the developmental stage. The rationale for focusing on teenagers lies in the belief that interventions implemented during this crucial period possess the potential to yield enduring impacts, thereby making a substantial contribution to the overall process of language learning (Akatsuka, 2019; Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2018; Hani et al., 2016; Iman, 2017; Kavanoz & Akbas, 2017; Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016; Liang & Fung, 2021; Nurhajati et al., 2020).

In contrast, a different group of eleven researchers chose to apply CT techniques specifically to adults (Afshar & Rahimi, 2014; Arfae, 2019; Candilas, 2021; Malmir, 2012; Ramezani et al., 2016; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014; Thammanoon & Ruben, 2022; Tosuncuoglu, 2018; Yaprak, 2020; Yuniar, 2021; Zare & Othman, 2015). Their reasoning came from the realization that adult participants constitute an ideal group to examine the potential of CT approaches since they were exposed to more abstract and sophisticated discussions. Working

with older students made it easier to explore complex subjects due to the fact that they had the experience and analytical ability to interact with and understand complex material.

There is a greater knowledge of how CT approaches affect language abilities throughout the lifetime as a result of the difference in study focus, with some researchers focusing on the early years of adolescence and others exploring the complexity of adult language acquisition. This comprehensive investigation enriches the applicability of CT treatments and offers insightful information to educators, academics, and administrators that aim to maximize language development tactics for a range of age groups.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This research synthesis aimed to identify the effects of using CT for enhancing speaking skills in EFL/ESL classrooms. The results of most studies analyzed showed that using CT activities/techniques revealed positive results in enhancing speaking skills (Afshar & Rahimi, 2014; Arfae, 2019; Bakhshayesh et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2018; Malmir 2012; Ramezani et al., 2016; Sanavi & Tarighat, 2014; Yaprak, 2020; Zare & Othman, 2015). One study (Tosuncuoglu, 2018) instead showed negative effects demonstrating the lack of teachers´ knowledge about CT and how they should conduct CT activities/techniques with explicit instructions to enhance speaking skills.

Two research questions that guided this study. The first research question addresses the effectiveness of using CT. Besides, how CT enhances speaking skills which shows greater benefits. Improvement in specific aspects like accuracy and fluency were found in 6 of the studies; the other studies showed an enrichment in students' speaking performance by the use of CT activities/techniques. Moreover, CT activities/techniques enable students to upgrade comprehension and coherence skills making them not only have better development of ideas but to have better results on oral tests or oral presentations and decrease speaking fear.

The second research question points out to identify the different CT activities/techniques to enhance speaking skills in EFL classrooms. There are different techniques used by the studies. It was discovered that the use of debates was a great technique for students who have problems supporting their opinions (Iman, 2017; Yuniar, 2021). Similarly, the use of exploratory talk (Leal Hernández & Gomez Rodriguez, 2016; Liang & Fung, 2021) showed that students increased the use of their own opinions giving relevant information about the topic on which they were working. Some authors (Kavanoz & Akbas, 2017; Thammanoon & Reuben, 2022) mentioned the use of the Ideation/ Questioning technique whose purpose is to improve students' performance, fluency, accuracy, comprehension, and pronunciation. Furthermore, other activities/techniques also have an important role in enhancing oral performances; these include Higher Order Thinking Skills, the Sekawan-P model, Six Thinking Hats, and Socratic Questioning (Akatsuka, 2019; Candilas, 2021; Hani et al., 2016; Nurhajati et al., 2020).

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the diversity of results after analyzing the 20 studies selected for this research synthesis, specific recommendations should be taken into consideration. Firstly, since most studies have shown positive effects on learners' speaking skills with the use of CT, we consider that it should be implemented within EFL/ESL classrooms as part of the National Curriculum. Implementing CT as part of the activities that have to be planned within the educational system may help students realize the importance of using the different CT skills. The analysis showed how CT activities improved and marked a big difference between those students who were taught with CT and those who were not.

Furthermore, CT showed an increase in coherence and comprehension. Therefore, it is really useful for learners to develop those abilities that would help to face any future issues related to the production of texts. Therefore, further research could be conducted in focusing on the effects of CT on other skills such as writing. Even though CT seems to focus on improving specific speaking skills aspects such as fluency and accuracy; it should be considered by researchers to investigate other linguistic areas, such as grammar or vocabulary. For that reason, the research of studies that contain more details about how CT works in the EFL/ESL classroom would be useful to get more insights, and thus, to know which techniques enhance not only the speaking skills but other language skills.

On the other hand, since we found a negative aspect in terms of using CT that relates to teachers' knowledge, teachers should receive CT training to apply CT with the right methodology. Therefore, for future education, prospective teachers should learn how to teach English using CT. With the development of brand-new programs, newly prepared professors and methodologies implementing CT will appear.

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